

**Transcript (Felix Bielefeld, Ringo Rösener, 2020) of
»Sources of Creative Power«
[Lecture X/1 (S-II)]
4/16/54
[Part II: Heraclitus]**



 [Audio file starts here.]

... have a first look at Heraclitus and we have no time to really treat Heraclitus as well as Solon. We only can have a look at them. As the course runs, it is necessary to stress other points. So we can only spend one more session on both of them, Heraclitus and Socrates. So I propose to do [this and have] a break of 10 minutes in between the two topics.

If we look today at Heraclitus in the light of modern science, then the dark man astonishes us very much. ›We have,‹ says [Werner Heisenberg](#), the modern atom physicist, ›we have chased matter down into the atom and there we lost it.‹ The statement means that science proceeding under the assumption that there is a thing of things. A thing that encompasses all things, namely matter exists and that therefore the so-called nature of this thing of things, this thing out of which all other things are composed, could be found, in the process, the long process of this search for matter, as this thing of things that supposedly everything contains, or has, or is. In this long process the scientists have finally lost matter in the atom. They do no longer know, or pretend to know what matter is. It was always only a pretension. Nor do they longer see fit to use this term ›matter‹ at all. It does not account for any phenomenon that they observe anymore.

With that an old suspicion of free and non-metaphysical philosophers, like Socrates, has finally been confirmed, namely the suspicion that this whole, the vision in matter and spirit, this whole concept of things is entirely a metaphysical assumption. Hypothesis of the human mind in order to make somehow distinctions. But with no reality to the concept whatsoever. After through all metaphysical philosophy we always have pretended to know what matter is or at least that matter is. Physicists find now that it might not exist at all. What they can observe, are phenomena of active processes. That is all they can say. That is their subject, matter. In the light of

that they still try to put the other term to the fact, to the phenomenon, namely the term ›energy‹. And they come to funny [sayings], like the same Werner Heisenberg says, ›we have found now an action of particles in the atom. And this action, this movement, we call energy.‹ So he says energy is matter. We have finally found matter, we have found out it to be energy. Well, so he knows exactly what he talks about, he does not know, what he says. If he says energy, calls something energy, then the next question, the philosophical question is, and where is the matter to that energy? Because there is no energy thinkable without matter; as well as there is no matter thinkable without energy. Both are mere hypothetical concepts of metaphysical value and as soon as matter cannot be applied any more as a term, energy cannot be applied as well. So he would have to talk about a mere active phenomenon, that appears by a lot of media, finally to our senses. That's all he could say if he wants to stick to what he really knows; and not say something more about that transcends, or transgresses rather what he is really knowing.

Heraclitus, since he has been rediscovered in the middle of the 19th century, has been used by many scientists, modern scientist, exactly for the purpose to transform by and by a world picture of matter into a world picture of energy. They understood very well that he has a dynamic picture of nature. A dynamic picture was supposed to be the same as an energetic picture. That was again muddled-thinking. It is by no means the same. Heraclitus never makes a distinction between matter and energy. He does not have the terms and he is not interested in it. He tries to describe the one thing he thinks he cannot [absorb] and know, namely processes of change of phenomena. That is all he claims.

Things – he tries to avoid this term or uses it. But it was never central with him. Now ›thing‹ is a main Greek term. Static thinking which was Greek thinking, which makes Heraclitus so non Greek, and explains why

he has been called by the Greeks ›The Dark One‹, because he had a dynamic picture; and they were for a static picture. They build statues. They believed in things. They took up when they created science and they were the ones that made science possible. They put science on a road of absorbing properties of things. The thing was supposed to be an entity in itself, and the all to be composed of infinite things, each an entity in itself – with properties of this entity qualities to be found out. The whole materialistic philosophy of the Greeks before Socrates except Heraclitus was based on the concept of matter as being the thing of things. They were after the thing of things. The thing of things could either be water out of which all other things came. So all other things contain water. Which is the thing of things.

Anaxagoras would finally say it is *nous* and introduces the distinction spirit and matter. But he means spirit, intellect, also as a thing, as the thing of things. Till finally Plato, as much a Greek as any of them, will (founding idealistic metaphysics) claim that there are eternal transcendent ideas which lived in a world of ideas, and those ideas are entities, they are of course things.

So except Socrates, as we will see, who avoids the same dangers that Heraclitus avoids and poses apparently more to Heraclitus than we could find out or he ever could confess – except him that not a single Greek thinker, scientist, or artists who would not have felt absolutely [stinged] towards this main point of Heraclitus: that there might be no things at all; that there only is continuous change, a permanent process, out of which we single out certain sets off phenomena and call them things. So he is not looking from the beginning in his philosophy for property or things. That's why he rejects knowledge. He rejects the knowledge of his time, including the scientific knowledge of his time. He does not think much of assembling more and more observed facts. He mocks people who do that, because he knows

that they think that in the properties of the absorbed things, which do not exist in his opinion, they will find the explanation; and he says to them, ›You will never find the explanation there. What we need is not knowledge but inquiry.‹

He rejects the Greek term, does not use a Greek term »noeîn« and from which we have our knowledge; which means absorb, accumulate knowledge, compare knowledge. He uses the verb »phronein«. »Phronein« means: not absorb theoretically not assemble facts and compare them – though this is also a part of science – but the essential part of science, namely to inquire after the laws of movements, the laws of happenings.

Because he distrusts the possibility of things, existing, does not really believe in things and might have suspected. But now, we can prove by the analysis that [Martin Heidegger](#) made; namely, that the scientific concept of things, which directed all Greek science except Heraclitus, is nothing but another Greek [anthropomorphism](#), anthropomorphic. Man is the only thing, he is no thing, he is a person. But because he is convinced, out of his inner experience, that he is an entity, because his inner experience is that he is an entity, he applies this, his concept, to natural phenomena and makes natural phenomena and calls them things. The term thing implies the qualification [of] an entity. Now this is the deep irony of this whole metaphysical development and of course it looks almost mythical in its irony: That we who started out with the Greek materialistic, scientific thinkers, who not knowing that they are real experience the realities they were moving on was the experience of the human person as an entity, and thought they can apply that to nature and say nature consists of things, that then finally we end up in the 20th century by trying to handle persons as things, not knowing anymore that if we could handle them as things in the original Greek sense, the metaphysical sense, we would also partly handle them as persons. But we handle them as functions and not even as things. So this irony, this

fantastic curve that let us into error after error, originated already in this little modeled thinking to apply, because one couldn't help it, an unknown and unrecognized inner experience of an entity in men, to supposed entities in nature, in natural events.

Since this developed the whole line of science, metaphysics, and art in the West Heraclitus had to be entirely left out of this development, and he was left out. Rediscovered in the 19th century and again mistaken, now mistaken for a man who set everything is energy that he by no means did. He never said what everything is, because he didn't believe in things. He only said that there is an infinite process of change and in this infinite process of change he tried to make certain distinguish qualifications. He talked about the absolute *logos*, which is transcendent and un-understandable and unapproachable. He talked about the *logos* of man, which is an infinite *logos*, and he talked about the *logos* of nature, which is a very finite *logos* – or law. That's all he said. He didn't say our word about what God is (that he is spirit); or what men is (that he is a mixture of spirit and matter); and what nature is (that is matter or the thing of things or thing). Not a word!

He abstains entirely from putting terms forward which he cannot rule. He makes only the observations a human being can make. He does not make a generalization, as matter would be. And that kept him out of the line of this development until now in the 20th century, after having him again mistaking him as a prophet of energy, we finally see that he could be of highest value to us. Because he might be the only philosopher – this old dark man, supposed to be so confused and obscure –, who could express modern scientific discoveries in words, and not only in mathematical formulas. Because he gives us a terminology to talk about sets of occurrences as phenomena and nothing else and not pretend that they are energy or matter or can be grasped by the application of terms like energy and matter.

The other thing we have seen, the astonishing fact that this man pretended to think that, if the logos of nature, the law of nature is such a simple one, restricted one that the infinite logos of man can put into it and handle it as we first [saw]. But then this seems to have enabled him to see and see that one is all, and all is one in nature. In the exact scientific sense, that everything can be changed, every natural phenomena can be changed into atomic power, atomic phenomena, and all can be changed back from atomic phenomena into other phenomena. That there is a central phenomenon which can change everything into everything, so to speak, as seems to be the hope of modern science. This he stayed the first as a fact.

When he says ›The thunderbolts steers the world,‹¹ – so we have to notice that everywhere else he talks about the fire, why doesn't he talk here about the fire? Why does he say he has a thunderbolt? This has been a riddle for all interpretation. It is not to be supposed that he is model headed that and doesn't use the terms equally. If he had said ›the fire steers the universe,‹ then he would have said that the fire is the mythical force or mystical force that is the driver of the universe. What he states is only that fire, radiation, is the wheel, the steering wheel of the universe – and not the driver. With the driver he means [Zeus](#). He used a thunderbolt because the thunderbolt is the weapon of Zeus. And the saying means ›Zeus steers the universe by the thunderbolt, by fire.‹

So the law of fire, the logos of fire, of radiation seems to him to be the most simple formula to bring all logoi, all the laws, of the universe on to one law of the universe: this of eternal, of infinite change. The change, as I said, is change and not becoming. The greatest mistake about Heraclitus has been taking him as a philosopher of becoming. This is Hegel's mistake. ›Becoming‹ means purpose, telos and reason involved. Heraclitus says no such thing. He means only change. Becoming can come into the change of nature by the infinitive logos of men, which is an infinite logos but not

¹ Heraclitus: Fragment [64](#).

an absolute one. By that man can brings, so to speak, another direction and visit meaning into the infinite change of nature. Then he can change the change into becoming. That would be his power. But the thing itself is by no means in any process of becoming as Hegel supposed and implies that Heraclitus [did say that]. Heraclitus thinks things that world and this process of change has been there forever and will be there forever – without any aim. Its logos is the law of perfect balance. As soon as the balance gets disturbed it will be restored, because it is perfectly balanced. That is its law. Given to it by Zeus, given to it by the absolute logos, which is willing and not willing to be called Zeus, as we know.

This we can find out and can proceed according to this law. His identification, and it is the first one in Greek language and in Greek thinking, of law and logos has a definite meaning. The term for law is [nomos](#). Now, [nomos](#) has the bad quality that it cannot be law in the sense as we understand law and as Heraclitus first tries to make us understand law. [Nomos](#) can be – because it means originally only the fence that fences of one of the other in its rights – [nomos](#) can be mistaken as order. [Nomos](#) can as well be only order and not in our sense law. The notion of law is one of the creative notions of the free human mind coming out of the myth and breaking this framework. And that is a very intriguing concept. We will see that better when we concern ourselves with [Solon](#).

Heraclitus is dark for another reason, because it is so hard to find out how he could be at the same time a philosopher, so to speak, the first philosopher of science. Philosopher of science, not a scientist! He was so little of a scientist that he thought sneeringly of Pythagoras. – Pythagoras discovered mathematics as a science. – What could possibly have Heraclitus induced to sneer at [Pythagoras](#)? Very simple reason: Pythagoras was founding Greek mathematics, full numbers, every number the symbol of a thing. Heraclitus did not believe in things. It might be that Heraclitus if he had met

Pascal or Leibniz who discovered the infinite calculus, that numbers are mere functions – mere functions in processes – that he would have listened and find it fascinating: what a wonderful tool this kind of mathematics could be for an inquiring mind. But the Greek mathematics, this is full numbers symbolizing things, he didn't think much of and he couldn't think much of that. Because he did not believe in things. He saw through this concept. He was non Greek, absolutely non Greek. He might not even have liked statues because statues in art might have resembled too much things.² Perhaps he would have been delighted with the last quartets of Beethoven, instead. Because they are mere functionality. Seems to play an artistic role, and it is something that seems to found the law, what he thought the law of processes, of movements and no traces of things is left any more.

So he could not appreciate the so-called science of his time, though this was science. Science had in a way to start in this first inquiry as a Greek started it. He talked of science since the Greeks, he can write books and write books [on] Greek science. There might never be written a book on Egyptian science or Inca science or Indian science. Though, the Babylonians were great astronomers, but they were astrologers too, so were the Egyptians. But the Greeks first discovered and Heraclitus describes in the human logos, in his concept of the human logos best, the tremendous creative capability of men to be objective. That means to abstract if he is concerned the phenomenal of nature entirely from his own subjectivity. Not to bring his wishes to master nature, by magic, into the concept. But first try to think with the logos of nature itself, with this restricted logos, and not to take anything else into consideration. Heraclitus might have said rightly if were alive today, 'And didn't the Greek, the other Greek thinkers, great scientists as they were, weren't they also magicians except 'me'?, because they believe in things, they believe in things, because it makes human beings feel better that things exist. It is the rest remainder of magical

² Regarding Greek statues see Lecture I (S I).

performance. They didn't have the courage to look at the fact itself, which reveals itself only as a function of processes. They didn't have the courage to face as such. They wanted the feel related in a kind of parent-ship with nature and that cost them the courage for be entirely objective: to look at things as they are.

So they all tried, and the Greeks can all claim objectivity as if the first manifestation of objectivity which makes science possible. The logos that Heraclitus supplies also makes possible the systematization of science. What he means, and he is really a modern mathematician, what he means by his law, the identification of law and logos, is to say that the key for »phronein«, for inquiry into the events, into the occurrences, is not in things and is not in the appearance. It is merely in the patterns of behavior that we can discover in such occurrences. That's what he calls law. These patterns of behavior, are infinite with human beings, which makes them free. They are quite definite infinite with natural occurrences, which makes it possible for men to analyze them, and to go in for a real scientific inquiry.

The wonder is that the same man, who seems in that way to be the first absolutely clear headed philosopher of science, who discovers the fundamental capability of men to be scientific and describes it, that the same man is also a political thinker. His book, as far we know of his book, seems to have two parts. One on nature, the other on the polis, on the state; and he is very much concerned with the law of the state, too. Now, it has been interpreted that way: that he having discovered the logos of nature has supposed that in human society there is also such a restricted logos. And that therefore human society could be a rule as nature can be ruled by man. And that he, being such a great scientific thinker, just is one of the guilty ones who prepared our modern predicament that we namely think that such a thing is possible; that human beings have a nature of man. That this the nature of man is finite, can be found out and that man can be handled or men

can be handled by man. But this isn't my opinion and a quite unjust accusation. If we look at this clear distinction between the infinite logos of man and the finite logos of nature, then we see that he could not have meant it.

Fortified that is, that opinion, by that he says, for instance, ›The law of man is also law in the city.‹³ He means the law in this sense. He does not mean the arbitrariness and the ordinances, nearly creating order of one man. But he supposes and his hometown forced him to do so. This whole town is a town of anarchy, the *ochlocracy*, the reign of the mob, *oligarchy*, the reign of the rich, *tyranny*, the reign of the single one, alternate constantly. They throw him out, and it seems, people thought that he has been a non political minded man, opposed all politics. On the contrary: You know by this his fellow citizens hated him. They hated him because he made the simple proposition. To become law-givers, to make in common the law for the community and then to follow it, and if one cannot do so, so at least accept a law of a benevolent tyrant, of an enlightened tyrant, so to speak, of somebody who is great enough to be impartial and impose the law on the city and follow this war. He is not even ready to go as far as *Thomas Hobbes* went, who, after a bad experience of religious war endless drive, came to the conclusion that there must be a highest power, the absolute power of the king, and we all have to submit to it regardless of this power is right or not, even if it is wrong. What he was after was order again at any price, order at least, but order is a negative thing. Order provides only that mass murder is not committed on a big scale. It is not a positive thing, is not the creative thing. Law is a creative thing. So the old slogan ›law and order‹ – which we all hear again and again in all political methods, mostly by reactionist – have first to be understood. In the sense that law and order are by no means the same. Order is easy to achieve, approximately easy, can be achieved by violence. That's a price that things get terrible, in order that the society might survive, it only needs order. But in order that a

³ Probably Heraclitus: Fragment 114.

community might be created and make men, their free citizens, creative, laws are required. Law in the sense of Heraclitus. His human law, the infinite logos of men is already a step toward Socrates' concept of reason, namely that things can be reasoned out between people and that if the status of lawfulness is creative, that means that the community is there are and everybody feels obliged to engage in the business of law-making not only law-abiding, that then the way is open for the development in freedom of every person and its inherent qualities.

This difference between law and order appears three times at the birth of our Western civilization. It appears with the Hebrews after the prelude of Abraham were righteousness, a pre-political concept, the dream of just making personal covenant and uniting mankind finally buy that, has been contradicted by history. Moses turned up as the law-giver, the law-giver, the law-bringer. But also the law-creator in our sense, in our understanding, but not as a law-creator, as the man who nearly brought the law. Till then in all myth, man was ruled by commands and did not know where the commands came from. That means by order, by an order of things, that was not even questioned. Now with this creation of the Hebrew religion by Moses, a funny thing takes place. Command is still taken, but putting the command into the mouth of an absolute transcendent highest God means already changing the command into law, adding to that the pact, the covenant that a people, a nation, better a state, a citizenry shall make with this laws means to acknowledge those commandments as laws. The court creation is already guaranteed to a certain degree. This is, so to speak, the myth that comes true. The myth is still used, but it is the next step to real freedom and a real concept of free law and free law-creating. This concept has done most when going into Christianity, Judaism and from there to all Western culture. To sustain, at least, a remainder of the original philosophical meaning of law as Heraclitus, Solon and Socrates have stipulated it. Another such happy

event was that the Romans changed order, mythical order, into a set of definite rational laws, which were interrelated scientifically and became a people of the law.

The Greeks had the deepest concept of the law. Their concept did not prevail, but it was preserved in those two other concepts which ruled Western humanity. And to a certain degree, even the Greek concept came up by merit of this relation again and again, and was tried again and again. We will see later how this relates to Solon and to our situation.

So Heraclitus was being mainly first interested into getting an absolute transcendent principle which is intelligence, logos, law of nature. At the same time [he] derives from it and very properly, as we see, the law for the community, for the living together of human beings. Now, in Greece all philosophers – and Plato and Aristotle are [no different]⁴ – are always more bound to politics, then [in] later [periods]. Philosophy parts from politics after the Greeks, or already with Plato and Aristotle. Socrates and Heraclitus, for them philosophy and politics are, are so to speak, absolutely united. They are Greeks in this original sense. Why? This phenomenon is our historical miracle. I said once here, that all those great deeds off the free philosophers breaking the myth, liberating the human mind in many fields, would not have prevailed, if there had not been a whole people, the Greeks, that by the wonder of arts, following Homer, succeeded to do one thing: translating this into politics. Succeeded to do a thing that nobody else can do because a political breakup of the mythical world was an infinite one. Nothing ever came out of it. Only the Greeks succeeded to build a community. [Until then]⁵ we have only societies.

A community means, as different from societies, to create a state by law in free agreement of the citizens, making the citizens participate in law-giving, to break the old order and transform it into the new law;

⁴ Original: »are there the same«, which is a very Germany phrase: »sind darin ähnlich«.

⁵ Original: »Up to there«.

agreement and creative procedure in togetherness. That is a new thing that comes up in Greece. And if that would not come up, we would never have had even states because we cannot call the Egyptian empire a state in the modern sense. States, even our non-free states, had always freedom in it. And this concept of the law, the law-state, from them on for Moses, the Romans and the Greeks on, has ruled the foundation of our politics, which made it possible that the concept of the real free state, the republic, could turn up in the 18th century again in America and even in French thinking. Otherwise it could not have turned up. This we owe to the Greeks too. That is what Schiller meant when he said, ›the greatest work of art of the Greek, the Greek polis, this was a new state of human affairs.‹⁶ Namely a state of human affairs, where people gathered for creative purposes, for a way of life, to be pursued which they decided upon and which was not imposed on them. Here, what all our great philosophers did, namely to get out of the mythical framework, to break the relations they were involved in, that were imposed on man, discover that man is a being that can establish relations, creative relations and to do so. This has been done here in a model in the Greek polis, in the Greek city-states. They tried exactly that. They tried to build a state of human affairs, which we can better call a community, which enables man to pursue in community the higher purposes of life; to consider that man is a being that can be and therefore be creative. The Greeks loved their city states because they knew when they looked around that nowhere else the opportunity was given to persons and to individuals. Towards the Greeks said, ›shine before the others‹. That means really to show who they are, to bring out all their creative capacities, and be appreciated for bring them out. To have a foundation finally, where this could become the aim of every person.

⁶ Reference unclear. Probably Schiller, Friedrich: On the Aesthetic Education of Man.

The first one who tried that, philosophically, merely philosophically, was after Solon, who tried it philosophically and politically, Heraclitus, who failed in politics – failed so bitterly that became an emigrant, refugee in his own city and had to dispose his book in the temple of [Artemis](#), the goddess, because he knew that they would burn his book. His book got lost anyhow. He had tried to convince them politically, that anarchic state of affairs where everybody socially only follows his own interests can only lead to destruction. And his bitter wish for the Ephesians when he says, ›may wealth never fail you Ephesians that your wickedness might be brought out‹. In order that the world might see that's they did not want to listen for reason. He wanted to awaken them as he wanted for awaken all human beings to their common sense, to the logos they have in common. He says, ›You are all asleep. You are all in your individual world of you own, but we have a world in common.‹⁷ This is the world of the logos. Not only we will be able to become masters of nature if we listen to the logos – and he always says, ›if the people will not listen not to me but listen to the logos, the universal law, then they will know.‹ But they don't want to, and they don't want to listen to the law in politics either, because they want to pursue their arbitrary wants and their individual interests. That is how he failed. He is a potential Greek statesman who saw very far, and failed completely. As he was a failure in philosophy ,too, till the middle of the 19th century as it seems he have been a failure everywhere. One can only say as a horror for the failures. If we discover later how much even there is left so little, how much far reaching thought and most modern thoughts have been contained in this kind of thinking.

I'm afraid I cannot even give you a break because otherwise we cannot even touch the question of Solon.

⁷ Probably Heraclitus: Fragment [1](#) and [21](#).

[Lecture X/1 (S-II)]
4/16/54
[Part I: Solon]

Solon lived before Heraclitus, and Solon was considered by the Greeks to be one of their [seven original wise men](#), [sages] of old Greece. Later, it seemed to us funny how they could have done that. Because how to call Solon a wise man – that means also a philosopher – seem to us later more and more un-understandable. He was so down to earth. Almost no theory – and we considered philosophy to be theory after Plato, mainly theory – was visible in the man. And I think that Plato and Aristotle must already have doubt it very much, if Solon could be rated that high. So we all did not. Now we try to reconsider the fact and see if the Greeks have not perhaps been right.

When he came, as the legend goes, to [Croesos](#) and have offended Croesos, the emperor of the [Lydians](#), by not praising him a happy man, saying to him modestly, ›we in Greece, at home, we don't call anybody happy before he's dead. Nobody knows what will come.‹ Something came to Croesos, as we all know, and he was saved only because they remembered Solon, and [Cyrus](#) got interested in his saying. But after he had offended Croesos so much, he spoke mildly with him and said to him, calling him a legend, ›you see, we claim nearly to have human reason, very down to earth reason, modest reason. We do not have heavenly or kingly reason in Greece or in Athens.‹ He was singing the praise of common sense, of modesty, of knowing that we do not know. As Socrates will later do, as Heraclitus, even earlier than Socrates but later than Solon did. To say ›we have an infinite logos but we have no absolute logos. We have no divine and no kingly reason. We have only reason of citizens, of human beings, a restricted reason compared to divine reason, but a limitless and infinite reason compared to the reason that is contained in nature.‹ So [it was] this simple Greek thinking Solon shared with the two

other great free philosophers of Greece, and that should make us already suspicious if he was not really wiser than we later supposed him to be.

If we call him as a witness in our inquiry, then we have to excuse ourselves to a certain degree as we excused ourselves with Homer. We found that to get at the philosophy of art, finally the best way is to ask the artist, who first made art as an independent free human creative capability come out, namely Homer, and see if he does not have the key – he had, as we saw. Politics that seem to be the same. It is also a field of deeds. Now with the Greeks, we can be fairly trustful, because they always thought that thoughts and deeds are the same. So with their politicians and their statements we are approximately sure that we might get a good model for somebody who knew what he was doing that means who was thinking of what he was doing. [Therefor Solon is perfect example]. His deeds and his thoughts are the same in the Homeric sense. Now it is nice to see that he's almost like [Achilles](#), a statesman who was the founder of the Athenian Republic, the Free State of Athens. And he describes his own doings and thinking in poems. He is singing constantly about the state, about himself, like Achilles coming home from the battle takes a lyra, takes a bow around, so to speak, and starts the harp. And then in old age, he occupied himself with trying to write an epic in the Homeric sense – [Atlantis](#) – about a country Atlantis, where the good laws had prevailed, where an ideal state of affairs had prevailed, and he wanted to take that as a parable and ordered to show his Athenians once more what he meant by law and by the free state. He gave it up because he felt too old.

It is remarkable that this first attempt after Homer, to use a myth, to use a myth here for philosophical, political purposes, has been taken up again by the old Plato who wanted also to rediscover and retell the old story of this lost continent, Atlantis, where everything had been so right, where the laws were so perfect, and gave it up, writing instead his

›Republic‹ with his eternal laws, with the perfect laws, with the absolute laws, with the metaphysical laws. And that the myth went on and on, and Atlantis was never forgotten. And the Atlantic Ocean was named Atlantic Ocean and people thought that this unknown continent of [old] had something down in the Atlantic Ocean. And then the men sent ships and discovered America and there was Atlantis. That means there was an island that almost united the two great oceans of the world, which could have been called Atlantis rightly. And the myth becomes even more funny. This man has become the first that tried to bow the way of Solon again, namely to build a republic that is based only on mutual agreement of free citizens and on nothing else, as a declaration of free will and nothing else, bringing in people from all countries and from all over the world and trying to unite them nearly as persons, as free responsible persons by making them agree to one constitution, which is a declaration of will, of common human will and nothing else, and trying to build a free republic. That's how far myth can carry. In this case the myth of Atlantis.


There's another myth involved in our political inquiry here. That is the original myth of the foundation of Athens. Solon, when he had become the dictator of Athens, because things have become unbearable and all classes knew that they would only destroy each other, that they could only destroy each other, made him, because he seemed to be so impartial, the dictator to give them laws. After he had done so – and he praises himself highly for that because that is terrific for a Greek – the Greek free cities were based on one very fantastic paradox, namely the paradox that every citizen had the idea that he should be the tyrant of the city, the absolute ruler because he was the best. He would be the one who could really give the laws alone by himself, and rule the city absolutely, such a great guy he was. Every Greek wanted to be that. At the same time, they established laws that made it impossible for everybody, as far as possible impossible, to become

such a thing like a tyrant. This paradox is on the basis of all Greek politics. As soon as somebody became to be known in Athens, they got distrustful that he might want to become a tyrant. It hit of course once the greatest and most sincere and impartial conservative politician statesmen of Athens, [Aristides](#). And when they had a law, you can write a name on a piece of [clay] and throw it on a heap, and then most of the citizens had written the name of somebody there, he was expelled from the state for many years. So Aristides was expelled. And Athenian citizens, who couldn't read or write, asked him, please write for me the name Aristides on this piece. And he said ›Yes.‹ Right after he did that, they said ›why you did that?‹ And he said: ›You see, I hear too much of this man.‹ This ›I hear too much of this man, he is too known, he is praised too much as the just one, make every citizen suspicious, next thing he will do, he will be after tyranny and will try to rule us all. Let's send him away for five years, that [we/he] might think better of it.‹ This paradox is prevailing in all Greek politics.

But Athens, which became this city-state for us and for all the world, where this thing, to build a new state of human affairs in freedom was achieved; it has already a founding myth. The founding myth is the myth of [Theseus](#), of which Homer unfortunately did not get hold, otherwise we would have had another great epic. So we have to try to write it a little bit – not to write it, but to line it out. At least to get that at the meaning of this myth in the way Homer got at the meaning of the Achilles and the Odysseus myth.

Theseus was [a bastard] of the Greek Athenian king, who was received by his father only when he showed him that he could step into his shoes and handle his sword. Then he was sent to Crete. In Crete the [Minotaur](#) was governing, and Crete – let's break the myth a little bit – was the ruler of Athens and of many Greek polis at that time, many Greek states. The king or emperor of [Knossos](#) expected tribute from them, as for instance in the myth, virgins ...



 [Audio file ends here.]